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# *A Necessary Falsehood in the Third Man Argument*

Dedicated to the Memory of Gregory Vlastos

THEODORE SCALTSAS

Last week I painted the garden gate, and the front door of the house, brown. But then I paused and pondered: What more could I do to make them the same colour? At first I despaired . . . but gradually my mind drifted to the Third Man Argument for help . . . My aim in this paper is to show that the premisses of the Third Man Argument (TMA) are committed to a distinction that falsifies them in every possible world. The distinction is between what makes a thing *f*, and what makes it qualitatively identical to another *f* thing. I will argue that according to the TMA, what makes something *f* is not sufficient for making it qualitatively identical to another *f* thing. But this is the denial of a necessary truth, namely, 'being *f* is sufficient for being *f*-identical to another *f* thing';<sup>1</sup> hence, the premisses of the TMA cannot be true in any possible world.

Apart from the logical analysis of the TMA, I also develop an interpretation of the Theory of Forms, regarding the nature of the Forms and of the relation of participation. My aim in proposing this interpretation is to show the plausibility of Plato's commitment to each of the premisses of the TMA, which, on alternative interpretations, become implausible, if not bizarre, beliefs to attribute to Plato. The interpretation will also help us gain an intuitive understanding of where and why the explanation offered by the Theory of Forms breaks down.<sup>2</sup>

\* The greatest part of the work for this paper was carried out during my Seeger Research Fellowship at Princeton University (Program in Hellenic Studies and Philosophy Department), Autumn, 1989. My research during that period was also supported by the British Academy with a Small Personal Research Grant. I am grateful to both institutions for providing me with the opportunity for research in a philosophically stimulating environment. I profited from the discussions of this paper at the following philosophical seminars, where it was presented: University of California – Davis, Monash University, Princeton University, University of Sydney. I am especially thankful to the following people for their useful suggestions, some of which are acknowledged in detail in the notes: David Armstrong, David Furley, Mary Louise Gill, David Robinson, Malcolm Schofield, Richard Sorabji, Timothy Sprigge.

<sup>1</sup> I use '*f*-identical' to mean identical with respect to being *f*.

<sup>2</sup> Space does not allow me to present and discuss the following two interpretations of the Third Man Argument, which are based on altogether different analyses. I shall briefly list

### 1. The Premises and the Regress

Within the context of the Theory of Forms, Plato explains that things are *f*<sup>3</sup> by participation in Form F.<sup>4</sup> Thus in the first part of the *Parmenides* he says:

the difficulties I find with these interpretations. Teloh and Louzecky (1972), and Teloh (1981, pp. 158-167), argue that an infinite regress follows from a single premiss that does not require the notion of Self-Predication. All that is needed is (T): 'If a number of things are F, there is a single Form in virtue of which we apprehend these things as F, and these things . . . are not identical with this Form', which requires only the notions of predication and non-identity (Teloh and Louzecky (1972, p. 87)). My objection to this analysis is that it will not generate a regress. To generate it a further premiss must be added, namely a *uniqueness premiss* that secures that for each set of things, the Form in virtue of which we apprehend them as F is unique to *that* set of things. Otherwise, a single Form would be sufficient for all sets. Teloh and Louzecky do *tacitly* introduce a uniqueness assumption: 'This Form [by which the *f* things in a set are apprehended to be *f*] is one in respect to the many things in the set of *f* things, and being required for that set is unique to it' (ibid., p. 85). But they offer no textual justification for such an assumption, which, further, is implausible for anyone to hold.

William Prior (1979) argues that when the logic of the theory of paradigms is understood, it becomes evident that Form F, *qua* paradigm, has *f*-ness on entirely different grounds than do *f* things. Prior's example is the King's foot, which is set as a standard of measure for 'one foot', and which, therefore, is one foot on *a priori* grounds, as opposed to all other things that are *n* feet long by comparison to the King's foot. Similarly, for Prior, Form F is *f*, not by sharing in some Form F (which would give rise to the regress, p. 232), but on *a priori* grounds *qua* paradigm (p. 236-237). My objection to Prior's analysis is that the theory of paradigms he expounds cannot be applied to the Forms. Prior's theory can explain the attribution of properties by convention to entities that have an existence *independently of that convention*, e.g. setting the rod to be one meter long. But what can a Form be such that it can *acquire* the property of being *f*, in the way that the rod acquires the property of being one meter long? Yet Prior claims that 'the paradigm *does* possess the property [of being *f*], but . . . the grounds for the attribution of the property are quite different in the case of the paradigm' (p. 237). To what is the property of being *f* attributed? There is nothing to which the property *f* can be attributed, so that the result of the attribution will be Form F. Contrary to Prior's claim, Form F cannot be *f* in the way the King's foot is one meter long.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. see *Phaedo* 100c-d. In the above formulation, '*f*' is a placeholder for general terms of opposites, like 'large', 'just', 'hot', etc., and arguably, from the *Parmenides*, substantial terms like 'man', 'tree' etc.

<sup>4</sup> In the *Phaedo* Plato introduces the Forms as *causes* of things becoming *f*. He explains why a thing is beautiful as follows:

I no longer understand nor can recognize those other wise reasons . . . but in a plain, artless, and possibly simple-minded way, I hold this close to myself: nothing else makes [*poiei*] it beautiful except that beautiful itself, whether by its presence or communion or whatever the manner and nature of the relation may be; . . . it is by the beautiful that all things are beautiful. (*Phaedo* 100c9-d8, translation from Gallop (1975)).

Do you not believe that there exists, alone by itself, a certain character of likeness, and again, another character opposite to it, what it is to be unlike; . . . Things that get a share of likeness become [gignesthai] like . . . (128e6-9a4).

Do you think, as you say, that there are certain characters, and that these others here, by reason of having a share in them, get their names from them? As for example, things that get a share of likeness become [gignesthai] like, of largeness large, . . . (130e5-131a2).<sup>5</sup>

That things are *f* by participating in Form F is the answer to two different questions, which Plato does not state separately. The first is, “Why is a thing *f*?” and the second, “Why are different things similar?” The first question concerns the *predication* of *f*-ness; the second, *qualitative identity* with respect to *f*-ness (or *f*-identity). The first concerns the *presence* of a property in a thing; the second, the *recurrence* of a single property in different things. The answer the Theory of Forms gives to the first is: a thing is *f* by participating in Form F. And to the second: two things are *f*-identical by both participating in one and the same Form, namely, Form F. Thus, the Theory of Forms explains the similarity of two different things by tracing their common condition to a single cause. *Sameness* of condition is explained through the *oneness* of the cause of the condition. If *different* Forms made different things *f*, then a further explanation would be required of the similarity between these different Forms, in order to explain the similarity of their effect in making their participants *f*. In other words, the similarity of the effects would have to be justified by the similarity of the causes. This explanatory regress is impeded if the cause of all the similar effects is numerically one.

It is of course essential, for such an explanation, that the cause be the cause of a *single condition*. Otherwise the same cause could produce different effects. Plato secures this by requiring that each Form be a single character or kind (*monoeides*, *Phaedo* 78d5), and hence, that each Form be the cause of a single condition. Thus, if different things participate in the same Form, they acquire the same condition. The *qualitative* and *numerical oneness* of the cause, then, is secured for the explanation of the *similarity* of its effects.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Further, in the text of the first TMA (*Parmenides* 132a1-b2) Plato says that entities that participate in the Form of Largeness ‘will all *be* [*estai*] large’ (132b1). In the second TMA (132c12-133a7), he says that by participation in the Form, things will *be* like (132e3, 133a1).

The translations of the *Parmenides* texts are from Allen (1983), unless otherwise specified.

<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, Plato realises that even the numerical and qualitative oneness of the *cause* is not sufficient for the qualitative identity of the effects, because of the mediation of multiple *relations* of participation between the *f* things and the Form. Namely, if *x* is

My concern in the analysis of the TMA is to show that the problem it encounters is deeply rooted in its premisses. The problem *underlies* the controversy of whether there is a single Form F per character, or many. That is, even if we assume that there are many Forms F per character, thus avoiding the contradiction Vlastos pointed to,<sup>7</sup> even then, the Theory cannot be salvaged; the premisses of the TMA are committed to a necessary falsehood – making them false in all possible worlds. So, although I agree with Vlastos's textual evidence that the TMA assumes there is only one Form F per character,<sup>8</sup> I will here follow Sellars,<sup>9</sup> Geach,<sup>10</sup> and Cohen,<sup>11</sup> in allowing for many Forms F per character. My aim is to show that, even when Vlastos' contradiction is avoided, it nevertheless remains the case that the premisses entail a necessary falsehood.

Let us now turn to the specification of the premisses of the TMA. (I shall use the term 'entity' to refer to both, things in the empirical world and Forms.)

**The TMA premisses:**

There are *f* things.

- (PP) An entity is *f* by participating in a Form F.
- (QI) Different entities are *f*-identical by participating in the same Form F.
- (NI) An *f* entity is different from the Form F by virtue of which the entity is *f*.
- (SP) A Form F is *f*.

It is clear that no assumption has been made about the *uniqueness* of Form F. That is, the premisses allow that there be many Forms F per character, e.g. many Forms of Justice or Largeness, just as Sellars required in order to avoid the inconsistency in Vlastos' premisses. (PP), the *Predication Pre-miss*, establishes the causal efficacy of a Form F. Plato makes this explicit when he states that Form F 'makes' an entity *f*, that an entity 'becomes' *f* by participating in a Form F, and that an entity 'is' *f* by participation in Form F.<sup>12</sup>

related by  $P_1$  to Form F, while *y* by  $P_2$ , etc., for the effects on *x* and *y* to be similar,  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  must be similar. But this is a problem that Plato tackles in the Dilemma of Participation, which I analyse in Scaltsas (1989, pp. 67-90).

<sup>7</sup> Vlastos derived the self-contradiction that Form F is different from itself (since an entity that is *f* is different from Form F, and Form F is *f*, Vlastos (1954, pp. 326, 331)). Sellars argued that the contradiction arises only because it is assumed that there is a unique Form F per character (Sellars (1955, pp. 406-407, 418-419)).

<sup>8</sup> Vlastos (1955, pp. 439-440).

<sup>9</sup> Sellars (1955, pp. 418).

<sup>10</sup> Geach (1956, p. 77).

<sup>11</sup> Cohen (1971, p. 462).

<sup>12</sup> The Form *poiei* something *f* (*Phaedo* 100d5). By participation, something *gignesthai f* (*Parmenides* 129a4, 131a2) and *esti f* (*Parmenides* 132b1).

(QI) is the *Qualitative Identity* premiss, which explains the sameness of *f* things through the qualitative and numeral oneness of the cause of their condition. It is important that this premiss, too, does not require that there be a single Form *F* per character. It does not say that there is a single Form *F* by virtue of which all *f* entities in the universe are the same. Rather, it states that, given any group of *f* entities, the sameness of their condition is explained through their participation in the same Form. This allows that a different group of *f* entities may have a different cause of their shared *f*-ness.<sup>13</sup>

Plato is firmly committed to QI. At every step in the regress, he does not require only the penultimate Form to participate in the new Form, in order to make the penultimate Form *f*. Rather, he additionally requires all the *f* entities that participate in the penultimate Form to also participate in the new Form. By this he secures that all these *f* entities and the penultimate Form will have one and the same cause of their *f*-ness – the new Form *F*. He says in the text of the first version of the TMA: ‘Therefore, another character of largeness will have made its appearance alongside largeness itself and the things that have a share of it; and over and above all those, again, a different one, *by which* they will *all* be large’ (*Parmenides* 132a10-b1, my emphasis). By insisting that not only the penultimate Form, but *all* the *f* entities below it, become *f* by participating in the new Form, Plato explains the qualitative identity between them.<sup>14</sup> If he allowed that some *f* entities become *f* by Form *F*<sub>1</sub>, while others become *f* by Form *F*<sub>2</sub>, and so on, he would still have to address the question of what makes Forms *F*<sub>1</sub>, *F*<sub>2</sub>, etc.,

<sup>13</sup> When QI is put to work in the generation of the regress, it will not apply to all *f* entities in the universe. I intend the grouping together of *f* entities at each step of the Third Man regress to be understood in terms of S. Marc Cohen’s notion of a *maximal set*, in Cohen (1971, pp. 461-464). See the analysis of the regress below.

<sup>14</sup> The text does not force us to take this position. What the text does is to introduce a second type of causal agency in the argument, which any interpretation must explain. Namely, despite the fact that object *x* is large by participation in the Form of Large<sub>n+1</sub>, Plato says that in the *n*th step, *x* is large by participation in the Form of Large<sub>n</sub> (‘*by which* they will *all* be large’, ‘ὅ ταῦτα πάντα μεγάλα ἔσται’, 132b1, my emphasis). Why does Plato require all the objects in each step (rather than just the penultimate Form) to participate in the highest Form? If the result of participation was just to make each of them *f*, he would be committing the system to overdetermination of causes for no reason at all; *x* would be *f* by participating in *F*<sub>1</sub>, and again by participating in *F*<sub>2</sub>, etc. My suggestion above is that Plato requires it because something *different* is achieved by participation in the *same* Form, over and above each participant’s becoming *f* by participating in a Form *F*. Namely, by participating in the same Form *F*, each participant becomes *qualitatively identical* to its co-participants in the same Form. This is explicitly stated in the second version of the TMA, at 132d9-e1.

qualitatively identical with respect to their causal powers, in order to explain why the entities that participate in them become qualitatively identical between themselves. If he did not address this question, his Theory would provide no account of the similarity between *f* things. But giving a non-vacuous answer to the *qualitative identity question* is an essential goal of the Theory of Forms, for which purpose QI is imported.

Plato is yet more explicit about QI in his second version of the TMA: 'And must not the thing which is like share with the thing that is like it in one and the same character?'<sup>15</sup>

Premiss (SP) is Vlastos' *Self-Predication* premiss (as amended by Sellars to allow for many Forms *F*) securing that each Form *F* is itself *f*. That the cause *possesses* the condition it produces in a thing was a fundamental belief in Greek thought that finds explicit expression in Aristotle: 'that which produces the form possesses it'.<sup>16</sup> Further, Jonathan Barnes gives reasons for tracing to the Presocratics the general principle: 'If something *F* comes into being from *a*, then *a* is *F*'.<sup>17</sup> Given the wide acceptance this claim enjoyed, it is no wonder that Plato would not consider Self-Predication a negotiable premiss.

Finally, (NI) is Vlastos' amended *Non-Identity* premiss, securing that the cause of *f*-ness is different from the entity that acquires *f*-ness. We can find justification for the Non-Identity thesis in Aristotle's system, in which, as in Plato's Theory, the generation of things requires the existence of forms. Form is not generated, according to Aristotle.<sup>18</sup> If it were, the generation of anything would require an infinite regress of generations.<sup>19</sup> So, if not generated, form must be *passed down* from cause to product. Hence, the cause must be different from the product (NI), and must possess the form it passes down to the product (SP).

The *regress* is generated from the premisses as follows. There are, for example, hot things in the world. Each of them is hot by participating in a

<sup>15</sup> *Parmenides* 132d9-e1. Cornford translation, from Cornford (Fifth printing). In fact, Plato describes this as a 'great necessity' (*megalē anankē*).

<sup>16</sup> *Physics* 257b10. The belief that *the cause possesses the form it produces in the thing* is so strong, that Aristotle finds a way of accommodating this truth even in the case where the cause is a *craftsman*: (although the builder is not a house) the form of the house is in the mind of the builder, and the builder's actions transmit that form to the matter (*Metaphysics* 1032b, *Generation of Animals* 730b).

<sup>17</sup> Barnes (1979, vol. 2, p. 135, his principle (1) along with vol. 1, p. 88, his (11)). See also discussion of Barnes' Synonymy Principle in the following section, below. I am grateful to David Robinson for referring me to Barnes' principle.

<sup>18</sup> *Metaphysics* 1034b7-13, 1039b24-25, 1044b21-23.

<sup>19</sup> *Metaphysics* 1033a34-b8.



Form of the Hot. They are qualitatively identical between themselves by participating in the same Form of the Hot. These hot things are different from the Form of the Hot that makes them hot. That Form of the Hot is itself hot. Hence, that Form of the Hot and the many hot things are all hot. Each of them is hot by participating in a Form of the Hot, and they are qualitatively identical by participating in the same Form of the Hot. These hot entities (the first Form of the Hot included) are different from the Form of the Hot that makes them hot. That Form of the Hot is itself hot. Hence, that second Form of the Hot and the hot entities that participate in it are hot by participating in a Form of the Hot . . . and so on. Hence, there will be *infinitely* many Forms of the Hot.<sup>20</sup>

## 2. The Necessary Falsehood

Our concern so far has been to determine the premisses to which the Theory of Forms commits us, from which the Third Man regress follows. We shall now turn to the question of the truth of these premisses.

According to the Theory, a thing *a* is *f* by participating in Form  $F_1$  – by PP. Form  $F_1$  is *f* – by SP. *a*'s participation in Form  $F_1$  is sufficient to make *a* an *f* thing. But *a*'s participation in Form  $F_1$  does *not* make *a* *f*-identical to  $F_1$ . [By QI, *a* is *f*-identical to  $F_1$  by participating, along with  $F_1$ , in the *same* Form, namely  $F_2$  (where  $F_1 \neq F_2$  by NI).] So *participation in Form  $F_1$*  makes *a* *f*, but *fails* to make it *f*-identical to an *f* entity, i.e. to Form  $F_1$  which is *f*. Therefore, according to the Theory of Forms, what makes a thing *f* is *not* sufficient for making it *f*-identical to an *f* entity, which is absurd.

That '*what makes a thing *f* is sufficient for making it *f*-identical to *f* things*' is a *necessary* truth, which is denied by the premisses of the TMA. Therefore, the premisses cannot be true in any possible world. A clarification might be helpful here. It is of course possible that *a* is *f* for different reasons than why *b* is *f*. For example, *a* (whose parents immigrated to this country) is a citizen of this country because he was born here, and *b* (who was not born here) is a citizen because his parents are citizens. Thus, what makes *a* a citizen of this country is different from what makes *b* a citizen of this country. But it cannot be the case that what makes *a* a citizen of this country is *different* from what makes *him* have the same citizenship with *b* (regardless of what makes *b* a citizen of the country). Whatever makes *a* a citizen of this country, thereby gives *him* the same citizenship with any other citizen of this country (however *they* may have acquired their citizenship). This is

<sup>20</sup> We could not abandon PP while retaining QI, nor abandon QI while retaining PP in the above premisses. The proof has been omitted because of lack of space.

denied by the premisses of the TMA.

In the TMA, the discrepancy arises from the fact that the Theory of Forms places different requirements for ‘making something *f*’ (PP) and for ‘making it *f*-identical’ to an *f* thing (QI). But this cannot be: making something *f* must be all that is required for making it *f*-identical to an *f* thing.

It is true that *a* does not participate *only* in  $F_1$ ; it participates in all the Forms *F* of the generated regress. Therefore, *a* is *f*-identical to Form  $F_1$ , since both *a* and  $F_1$  participate in  $F_2$ . But this does not remove the discrepancy. The question is *not* whether *a* is *f*-identical to Form  $F_1$  or not; that it *is*. Rather, the question is whether the *condition* that makes *a* *f* – participation in  $F_1$  – is sufficient to make *a* *f*-identical to an *f* entity – Form  $F_1$ . What is sufficient for making something *f* must be sufficient for making it *f*-identical to an *f* entity. But according to the Theory of Forms it is not, since participation in Form  $F_1$  makes *a* *f*, but not *f*-identical to Form  $F_1$ , which is *f*.<sup>21</sup>

This failure cannot be overcome by the Theory, whether there is just *one*, or *finitely* many, or *infinitely* many, Forms *F* per character. It will always be the case that Form *F* makes a thing *f*, but does not make it *f*-identical to the Form itself, which is *f*. So, regardless of how many Forms *F* there are, the Theory is committed to the absurdity that participation in any Form *F* makes the things *f*, without making them *f*-identical to an *f* entity – that Form.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The falsehood is generated from the incompatibility between QI and PP. But even if we exclude PP from the premisses, the remaining premisses are still necessarily false, because PP reappears. The reason is that the condition that is sufficient for making two things *f*-identical to one another should be sufficient for making them *f*-identical to anything else to which they are *f*-identical. So participation in Form  $F_1$ , which makes *a* and *b* *f*-identical, should be sufficient to make them *f*-identical to  $F_1$  (which is *f*-identical to them, by the SP of that version); but it is *not* sufficient, according to the Theory, since it is their common participation in  $F_2$  that achieves that. Hence, the absurdity. The reason why the discrepancy persists even without PP is that the premisses allow us to talk of what makes a thing *f*-identical to another, which is nothing other than talking of that thing’s being *f*. Hence, we have not really abandoned PP from the premisses, nor treated qualitative identity as an unanalysable primitive. Rather, PP has re-appeared in QI, which claims that there is a condition a thing must satisfy to become *f*-identical to another, namely *participation* in Form *F*, which is what possessing *f*-ness is.

<sup>22</sup> S. Marc Cohen does not include QI and PP in his premisses. It should therefore come as no surprise that in his version, the premisses of the TMA turn out to be ‘a consistent premise set’ (Cohen (1971, p. 456)). Cohen’s interpretation does not take into account the *causal efficacy* of participation in Forms. As we have seen (Section 1, especially note 14), Plato insists on two, *causally different*, conditions: participating in a Form *F*, and participating in the same Form *F*; the first is associated with being *f*, while the second with

### 3. The Interpretation

We have now identified the premisses of the TMA. How are we to understand them? Some of the premisses of the TMA are at first glance implausible, which raises the question of why Plato felt committed to them. For example, the Self-Predication premiss, which is very bizarre if we give the Forms an epistemological interpretation, as is often done. The *concept* of Largeness is not large, so it is difficult to see why Plato or anyone else would ever assume that. Similarly, we are not helped in understanding SP by thinking of the Forms set-theoretically; the *set* of green things is not green. To understand why Plato is committed to the premisses of the TMA we need to understand the type of explanation that he is offering through the Theory of Forms.

One of the most ancient models of explanation is *explanation by origin*. According to it, the presence of a feature is explained by identifying the *producer* or *creator*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, an artifact is beautiful because Hephaestus or Pheidias made it, and Pharaohs have superlative wisdom because of their divine origin. A restriction on the generality of explanation by origin is imported by what Barnes has described as the *Synonymy Principle*, which he considers to have a Presocratic origin (Barnes (1979, vol. 1, p. 88)): “Causation is by synonyms” . . . the principle is supported by numerous examples; and it helps to explain the occult property of causality: causes produce changes in the objects they effect by transferring or imparting something to those objects; when the fire makes me warm, it bestows heat upon me’.<sup>24</sup> The restriction introduced by the synonymy principle is the

being-*f*-identical to another *f* thing. In Cohen’s version, the One-over-Many premiss is the following: ‘For any maximal set there is exactly one Form in which all and only members of that set participate’ (Cohen (1971, p. 462)). This premiss fails to connect participation in a Form to either being *f*, or to being *f*-identical to other things. The premiss provides only an existential principle generating Forms. But the premiss does not specify what, according to the Theory, is *achieved* by participation in a Form. More importantly it does not explain why it is that Plato requires that at each step, it is the last Form in that step ‘by which they [i.e. the large things and Forms participating in it] will all be large’ (ὥς τὰ ὅλα πάντα μεγάλα ἔσται, *Parmenides* 132b1, my emphasis). The causal efficacy of participation in the latest Form in each step needs justification, which is not offered in Cohen’s premisses. In my version, it is explained by showing that according to the Theory, participation in the *same* Form *F* does work that participation in *a* Form *F* does not do; namely, participation in the same Form *F* accounts, not only for being *f*, but also for being qualitatively identical to other *f* things.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Moravcsik (1989, p. 258).

<sup>24</sup> Barnes (1979, vol. 2, p. 119, and vol. 1, p. 88). An example, suggested to me by David Robinson, is given in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 1070a4-5: ‘each substance comes into being out of something synonymous’ (where synonymy requires sameness of kind, *Categories* 1a6-7).

requirement of *similarity* between the nature of the producer and the nature of the product. A particular strand of explanation by ‘synonymous origin’ is the explanation of a phenomenon by the *inheritance* of characteristics. On this *biological model of explanation*, the presence of a feature is explained by identifying the parents as the *source* from which the feature was *inherited*; thus Aristotle: ‘the producer is of the same kind as the produced . . . (for man produces man)’ (*Metaphysics* 1033b30-32).<sup>25</sup>

The *biological model of explanation* is characterised by the following four features. First, explanation of the presence of a feature in the offspring consists in tracing the feature in question to the source, the parents. Otherwise, no explanation has been given, since nothing inherits a feature from itself. Second, the source from which the feature has been inherited must itself possess that feature. If the parents do not possess the feature, they cannot pass it on to the offspring. Third, the relation of offspring to parents is such that the feature of the parents can be passed on to the offspring that inherits it. Fourth, similarity between offspring is explained in terms of their family-relation: they are similar because they inherit the characteristic from the same parents.<sup>26</sup>

One can see how the biological model matches the explanatory use that Plato makes of the Theory of Forms regarding why things are *f*. Understanding the Theory in terms of the biological model, a Form *F* is the *source* of *f*-ness, and things that participate in the Form *inherit* their *f*-ness from the Form. The source from which the *f*-ness is inherited must be different from the thing that inherits it. Otherwise, no explanation is offered since a thing can inherit nothing from itself. Hence, the Non-Identity between an entity and the Form it partakes of. Further, the source must itself possess *f*-ness. If the source does not possess *f*-ness, nothing can inherit *f*-ness from that source. Hence, Self-Predication. That the relation of thing to source is such as to allow the thing to inherit the *f*-ness of the source is guaranteed by the Predication-Premiss. And finally, that two or more things resemble one another because they share a common origin of their condition – because

<sup>25</sup> I use the term ‘biological model’ to capture some, only, features of this type of explanation, which will become clear in what follows. It should not be thought that this model of explanation does justice to all our fundamental intuitions regarding biological inheritance relations.

<sup>26</sup> I originally described this model of explanation in terms of a *medical* rather than a biological paradigm. I had then considered a version of the biological model and not chosen it for reasons given in Scaltsas (1989, pp. 68-69). I have now returned to the biological one because it can be better historically documented. I would like to thank Mary Louise Gill for encouraging me to adopt the biological model.

they are family-related – is secured in the Qualitative-Identity premiss.

Plato, himself, uses the biological model to describe the role of the Forms in the world. He describes the generation of things in the world as follows, in the *Timaeus*: the *eternal intelligible beings* (the Forms) are like a *father*, who is the *source* (*to d'hothen*, 50d1) of the forms that are passed on to a receptacle (acting as matter), thereby generating *children* (i.e. things in the world) that *resemble* that father (the Forms).<sup>27</sup> The biological model itself is elaborately developed by Aristotle, where the movement in the semen transmits the form of the father to the offspring.<sup>28</sup>

On the biological model, Form F, *qua* source of *f*-ness, endows the participating things with *what it takes to be f*. Acquiring what it takes to be *f* is acquiring the necessary and sufficient condition for being *f*. But since the Form must possess this feature in actuality, the Form is the *realised necessary and sufficient condition for being f*. This allows the Form to be either the *property of f*-ness or the *paradigm f* thing. It further allows the participation relation to be either a *content-relation*, e.g. having a part of the property, or a *form-relation*, e.g. resembling the paradigm. Plato explores both types of relation in the two versions of the TMA he offers in the text.<sup>29</sup>

On the basis of the interpretation of the Theory of Forms through the biological model of explanation, we can understand the requirements made by PP and QI as follows. PP tells us that a creature is human because it inherited the nature of its human parents. QI says that two creatures are similar because they have the same origin. But then it follows that, although the offspring has inherited the parents' nature, that does *not* make it similar to its parents, since what makes it similar to them is that they all come from the same grandparents. That is absurd.

I think it would be profitable to discuss the query of an anonymous referee. The referee wondered whether there is anything wrong with offering the following explanation in terms of the biological model: what makes me human is that I have a human ancestor; what makes you human is that you have a human ancestor; what makes us both human is that we have

<sup>27</sup> *Timaeus* 50c-51b. I am grateful to Mary Louise Gill for this reference; see Gill (1987, p. 38).

<sup>28</sup> *Generation of Animals*, 730b. In Aristotle, for the reasons explained in note 16, the biological model drifts close together with the *craftsman* model of explanation. (See the *Phaedo* passage in note 4 for suggestions of the *craftsman* model in the Theory of the Forms.)

<sup>29</sup> *Parmenides* 132a1-b2, and 132c12-133a7. For my reasons for claiming that the first version of the TMA is exploring participation as a *content*-relation, see Scaltsas (1989, pp. 72-73, and 87).

a common human ancestor; what makes both us and our ancestor human is that we all three have a common human ancestor. The point of the question is to indicate that there is after all a common condition that is responsible for both, being human and being the same as other humans, namely: having the same human ancestor. Regardless who the ancestor is, 'having the same ancestor' is in all cases what accounts for being human and being qualitatively identical to other humans. But even here there is a discrepancy between predication and qualitative identity; what makes me human is different from what makes me the same as you. I am human because 'I have a human ancestor', while I am the same with you because 'we have the *same* human ancestor'. So, that I am human because my parents are human, and you are human because your parents are human, does not establish, even on this explanation, that we are similar with respect to being human, since it is not established that we have any common ancestors. But this could not be: if we are human, we must be similar.

#### 4. Was Plato Aware of the Necessary Falsehood?

Sellars thought that although on his version the premisses of the TMA are consistent (Sellars (1955, p. 419)), Plato still had good reason to reject it because it involved an infinity of Forms F: 'there is no logical absurdity in an infinite series as such. . . . But would not Plato himself have regarded the infinite series as already unacceptable, and sufficient to refute the Theory if it could be shown to be a consequence of it?' (Sellars (1955, p. 407)) But, why should Plato object to the infinity of Forms F per character, if that gave a solution to the most fundamental metaphysical problems, namely, the problem of predication and that of qualitative identity? Yet, Plato does object to it, but I shall argue it is not because of his fear for the *infinity* of Forms F per character, but because of his fear of the *multitude* of Forms F, whether infinite or finite.

In the first version of the TMA, the opening line claims the uniqueness of Form F: 'I suppose you think that each character is one' (132a1). And the conclusion states the contradictory result: 'each of the characters will no longer be one for you but unlimited in multitude' (132b1-2). Similarly, in the second version of the TMA, Plato again assumes there is only one Form per character,<sup>30</sup> and derives an infinity of Forms per character (133a1-2). Importantly, he does not suggest that the contradiction can be avoided by giving up the uniqueness of Form F. Far from it, he proceeds to conclude

<sup>30</sup> See use of definite article, in '*the* character', at 132d5 and 132e6.

from this contradiction that the assumption that participation is a resemblance relation cannot save the Theory of Forms, since, even on this assumption, we still get the contradiction (of one Form – many Forms, 133a5-7). It follows, therefore, that for Plato there is no way out of the contradiction, and therefore, that for him, the uniqueness of Form F is an inviolable, non-negotiable premiss of the Theory. Why?

Why is Plato not hailing the TMA as a discovery that there are infinitely many Forms per character, rather than only one? Why is he not celebrating the TMA as an argument that reveals, through the regress, the true answer to the question of why things are *f*? I believe the reason is the following. Form F is assumed to be the source of *f*-ness, on the basis of which we can explain why things are *f*. If the source of *f*-ness cannot account for all the *f*-predication and *f*-identity in the world,<sup>31</sup> adding more sources to complete the task would be a non-starter. The very *cloning* of the source – Form F – undermines the possibility of there being a *source*.

But there are two different problems that arise from the multiplicity of Forms F per character, and it is only one of the two that Plato is concerned about in the TMA. The following distinction must be introduced to sharply differentiate between two deceptively similar problems of multiplicity of Forms. We have already seen that the Theory of Forms explains the similarity between things in terms of the oneness of the cause of their condition. Thus, consider the following situation: *a* is *f* by participating in Form F<sub>1</sub> (but not in F<sub>2</sub>), and *b* is *f* by participating in Form F<sub>2</sub> (but not in F<sub>1</sub>), and neither Form participates in the another; here the question of the similarity of *a* and *b* has not been answered by the Theory. An account would still be required of the similarity between F<sub>1</sub> and F<sub>2</sub> to explain why their effects on *a* and *b* are similar, making *a* and *b* *f*. So, a multitude of sources of *f*-ness is incompatible with the Theory's attempt to answer the qualitative identity question in terms of a singular cause of the condition of similar things.<sup>32</sup> Let us call this case of multiplicity of sources the *Dissociative Multiplicity of Forms*. ('Dissociative' to indicate that a thing that participates in one Form F does not participate in other Forms F.)

This is *not* the problem that the multiplicity of Forms would give rise to in the TMA, if Plato allowed for many Forms F per character. The difference

<sup>31</sup> E.g. it cannot account for its own *f*-ness and for its *f*-identity to *f* things.

<sup>32</sup> I have argued that this case of multiplicity of Forms F per character is rejected by Plato by his rejection of participation in parts of the Form (131c5-11), in the Second Horn of the Dilemma of Participation. The reason is that such a theory would fail to address the qualitative identity question. See Scaltsas (1989, pp. 76-78, especially the First Disjunct).



is that in the TMA structure, a *thing* participates in *all* Forms *F*.<sup>33</sup> Let us call this case of multiplicity of sources the *Associative Multiplicity of Forms*, to indicate that if a thing participates in one, it participates in all Forms *F*. Plato must be fully aware of the difference between the two cases of multiplicity of Forms *F*, if he discusses them separately and uses different arguments to counter each of them.<sup>34</sup> The formal difference between the two cases of multiplicity of Forms is that the Associative satisfies, while the Dissociative does not satisfy, the condition for qualitative identity: for any two *f* entities (things or Forms), there is a Form *F* in which they both participate.<sup>35</sup>

Let us consider the Associative type of multiplicity of Forms, which satisfies the condition for qualitative identity. (I.e. let us assume that Plato allows for the many Forms *F* of the TMA regress.) The difficulty here is *not* that there are *f* things that do not share a common source of their *f*-ness. Rather, it is that, given an *f* thing, the source of its *f*-ness is different from the source of its *f*-identity to other *f* things. *F*<sub>2</sub> does for *a* just what *F*<sub>1</sub> does for *a*, namely, make it *f*. And yet, in so doing, *F*<sub>2</sub> does for *a* what *F*<sub>1</sub> fails to do for *a*, namely, make *a* *f*-identical to *F*<sub>1</sub>. The *absurdity* is that the contribution that *F*<sub>2</sub> makes to *a* must be *both* identical to the contribution that *F*<sub>1</sub> makes to *a* and different from the contribution that *F*<sub>1</sub> makes to *a*. This discrepancy must be what is *preventing* Plato from allowing for more than one Form *F* per character.

The problem, here too, as in the Dissociative case, is with the multiplicity of sources. But here it is not that, given any two *f* entities, we cannot find a common source in which they participate. Rather, it is that the source of *f*-ness of a thing is different from its source of *f*-identity to other *f*-things. This is an unacceptable *division of semantic labour between f-predication and f-identity*: The Form that makes something *f* does not also make it *f*-identical to all other *f* entities (e.g., it cannot make the thing *f*-identical to the Form itself; other Forms have to be allocated that task).<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> This, of course, would not be true of Forms *F*, since e.g. Form *F*<sub>3</sub> does not participate in *F*<sub>2</sub>.

<sup>34</sup> He dismisses the Dissociative case in the Second Horn of the Dilemma of Participation (see note 32), and the Associative case in the TMA.

<sup>35</sup> If Form *F* were unique, then the Theory would satisfy the stronger condition, that there is a Form *F* in which any two *f* entities participate.

<sup>36</sup> In a set theoretic interpretation of the TMA, the problem of the division of semantic labour arises from the fact that being *f* is being a member of any one of different, maximal (see note 13 above), sets of *f* entities. But how can 'being *f*' be being a member of a set of *f* entities, when that set excludes even one *f* entity – as all sets in the TMA regress do? Being a member of the same set purports to be what is common between *f* entities, to the exclusion of non-*f* entities. If some *f* entities are also excluded from the set, then



In conclusion, then, Plato assumed a *unique* Form F per character, and was forced by the TMA to conclude that there are *many* Forms F per character. He could have avoided the contradiction by allowing an (Associative) multiplicity of Forms F per character, while hailing the TMA as their discovery! That he did not do so indicates that he had an immediate apprehension of the threat that such a multiplicity of sources of *f*-ness posed for the Theory of Forms. We have no evidence that Plato saw the threat clearly for what it is, namely, as the absurd division of semantic labour between *f*-predication and *f*-identity. But he *could* see that having many sources of *f*-ness is having no *source* of *f*-ness. Hence, multiplicity of Forms F per character was seen as fatal to the Theory, and hence, the TMA (which shows that even when he assumes a unique Form F, to explain why things are *f*, infinitely many Forms F need to be imported to do the job) was seen as a criticism of the Theory rather than the salvation of it.

## 5. Conclusion

My concern in this paper has been, first, to offer a logical analysis of the Third Man Argument, by identifying the premisses and examining their truth. Second, to provide an interpretation of the Forms and the participation relation, which would help us understand why Plato committed himself to these premisses. The pursuit of the *logic* of the argument resulted in the identification of two distinct premisses, one explaining why things are *f*, and the other, why things are similar with respect to *f*-ness. This revealed a discrepancy between the two premisses: satisfying the condition for being *f* is not sufficient for being qualitatively identical to an *f* entity – which is absurd. This absurdity is derived on the minimal set of premisses required for the TMA regress, which does not include the premiss in Vlastos' analysis, that there is a unique Form F per character.

The *interpretation* involved understanding a Form as a source of *f*-ness, and participation in a Form as the acquisition of the *f*-ness of the Form. The interpretation allows us to understand how Plato used the Theory to answer both the predication and the qualitative identity questions. First, a thing is *f* by acquiring its *f*-ness from the source, and second, it is similar to other *f* things by sharing with them one and the same source of their condition. But herein lies the problem: the first claims that a thing acquires the condition of

membership in that set cannot be what *f* entities share in common. So membership in the set fails to qualify its members as *f*-identical to the *f* entities which are excluded from that set. But failing to qualify them as being *f*-identical to *f* entities is failing to qualify them as being *f*.

the source (thereby becoming *similar* to it) by *participating* in it; the second claims that the thing becomes *similar* to the source (*not* by *participating* in it, but) only by participating along with the source in a further source. Hence the absurdity.

The conclusion of the above analysis is that the Theory of Forms is an impossible explanatory model of why things are *f*. It requires *participation* in a Form *F* to *pass on* the Form's condition to the participating thing; but it denies that *participation* in that Form is what makes the thing *similar* to that Form.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the Theory makes impossible demands on the participation relation.

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<sup>37</sup> Both the thing and the Form must participate in a further Form to be similar.

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